

## **Training foreign forces in Air Force special ops**

**“Esta noche vamos a hacer aterrizajes en pistas clandestinas usando visores nocturnos.”**

**“Tonight we will do landings at clandestine airfields using night vision goggles”**

**Sixth Special Operations Squadron instructor said to Colombian forces.**

By Capt. Tom Montgomery  
Air Force Special Operations Command

The 6th Special Operations Squadron at Hurlburt Field, Fla., is the only unit in the United States military with a wartime mission to assess, train, advise and assist foreign aviation forces. They routinely operate in the most dangerous corners of the world, where terrorists, warlords and criminals thrive.

In these environments, the Air Commandos in the 6th SOS are challenged to enable our foreign allies to employ and sustain air and space power.

“Our ability to train and advise foreign aviation forces has more long-term, strategic relevance in the war on terrorism and insurgency than direct tactical actions by United States forces,” said Jerry Klingaman, squadron director of strategy and plans.

“We offer a strategy of military enablement, and that’s crucial to our current national security posture.”

The 6th SOS prepares for this task with some very advanced training. Upon acceptance to the squadron, it takes a new member nearly a year of training to become mission qualified.

The unit is able to teach foreign forces to maintain, fly and fight in a myriad of foreign aircraft. In fact, some of the aircraft they are proficient in are Russian and have Cyrillic (Russian) wording on the gauges.

Equally important, all members of the 6th SOS have annual language training or are native speakers.

Training also includes advanced weapons skills and instruction covering regional and political issues.

The Global War on Terrorism has made it imperative for the United States to develop overseas partnerships and realign its forces to meet emerging threats. The United States will also need to rely more on the ability of allies to defend themselves and assist in fighting terrorists.

Special Operations Command has been tasked as the lead command for the Global War on Terrorism. As such, Air Force Special Operations Command is the air component to this challenge and is developing more capabilities to accomplish these missions. There is current direction to significantly increase the size of the 6th SOS which currently has more than 30 Air Force job specialties represented in a unit comprised of around 100 Airmen.

Geographic combatant commanders are working to deny terrorists safe haven in their parts of the globe while SOCOM and AFSOC maintain worldwide reach.

The 6th recently returned from a mission in North Africa where they were teaching foreign air forces improved and specialized tactics and techniques. The training these countries receive is critical for them to keep their ground forces re-supplied and combat-ready.

North Africa presents a serious challenge for the 6th SOS. Terrorist groups, bandits and rebels have exploited the region as a safe haven. The Sahara and Pan Sahel regions span across an area as large as the continental United States where human existence is barely possible with 130

degree temperatures and bone dry deserts. It's the perfect place for a bad guy to hide, and the hardest place for under developed governments to find and engage the enemy.

"It's not easy to keep the ground troops resupplied via convoy vehicles in the region because if the bandits or land mines don't get you, the heat will. So, we teach them to use air power," said a 6th SOS lieutenant colonel who was a mission commander there.

The colonel, who speaks French, led a team that taught advanced fixed and rotary wing tactics in the C-130 and Mi-17. In North Africa, the languages spoken are French, Arabic, and tribal, so language proficiency is very important for the combat advisors.

"When we got the pilots ready and they began to fly supplies into austere landing strips, we were heroes to their army guys. And, when it came time to leave the country, the government wanted us to stay," said the colonel.

The 6th SOS is aligned to accomplish their mission all over the globe. In fact, the squadron's flights are performed in Southern Command, Pacific Command, Central Command and European Command.

SOUTHCOM flight conducted training in Colombia that resulted in the Colombian military being able to conduct joint insertion and extraction missions with night vision goggles.

"For Colombia, our efforts resulted in the first ever use of NVG capability in a joint combat search and rescue operation," said a 6th SOS major who was a mission commander there. The major is a heritage Spanish speaker and fixed-wing pilot.

"Narcotics and terrorism go hand in hand," Klingaman said. "And Colombia remains a hotbed for this activity. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia have been at war with the Colombian government for decades, funding their insurgency through extortion, kidnapping and narcotics sales."

The 6th SOS also enhanced the Colombians ability to employ their AC-47 gunship in close air support and other missions.

"We don't teach them how to fly the aircraft. We teach them how to use the aircraft's full capabilities and how to use it as a tactical weapon system," Klingaman said.

The 6th also operates in another hot bed for terrorism. Southeast Asia has emerged as a haven for radical Islamic terrorist groups like al Qaeda. The Philippine government has been fighting against numerous such groups.

The 6th SOS recently trained the Philippine air force to have a quick reaction force of combat lifesavers. The team of instructors from the 6th SOS included pilots, maintainers, security forces, medical personnel trained as international health specialists, Pararescuemen; and others.

"Before our mobile training team arrived, the Philippine air force had the ability to take off and land during the day. After our training, they were able to conduct multiple aircraft, multiple formation infil-exfil missions at night on NVG's with gunnery and with combat lifesavers rappelling and fast roping out to save lives," said a major with the 6th SOS, who was mission commander.

It wasn't easy to go from basic flying to where they are today. In order to train the lifesavers to do intravenous procedures in a helicopter encountering turbulence, a 6th SOS technical sergeant took the Philippine combat lifesavers on a bouncing deuce-and-a-half truck to practice on each other.

"Immediately after our first iterations of training, the Philippine air force was called in to do a combat exfiltration and they saved the lives of three Philippine army soldiers on an NVG helo

medevac,” the major said.

These internationally savvy warrior-teachers continue to operate all over the globe, enabling friendly forces to bring air and space power to the fight. Their unique mission and training make them a key component to SOCOM's capability to fight terrorists on foreign soil.



Members of the 6th Special Operations Squadron are welcomed by regulars of a North African country after a resupply mission. Overland convoys are nearly impossible in this region due to terrorists, insurgents, bandits, land mines, extreme temperatures and hazardous road conditions. Airland resupply operations have greatly enhanced Army capabilities in this and other countries in the Pan Sahel desert region. AFSOC photo.

A 6th SOS adviser and Philippine Air Force Range Security Team conduct medical evacuation procedures during a coalition training exercise. AFSOC photo.



6th SOS personnel and Philippine Air Force Range Security Team conduct rope ladder training. AFSOC photo.

A 6th SOS helicopter pilot instructs African pilots in tactics on a Russian-made Mi-17 helicopter. AFSOC photo.

